

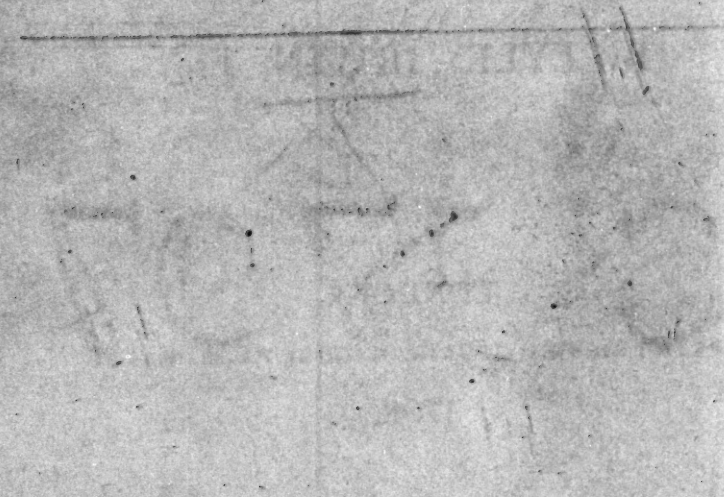
ENQUIRY
AN
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INTO THE
FEASIBILITY
OF THE
SUPPOSED EXPEDITION
OF
BUONAPARTÉ TO THE EAST.

BY EYLES IRWIN, ESQ.

LONDON:

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Quid Crassos, quid Pompeios evertit, et illum,
Ad sua qui domitos deduxit flagra Quirites?

JUV.

BY EYLES IRWIN, Esq.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR GEORGE NICOL, PALL-MALL.

1798.

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OF

BUONAPARTE TO THE EAST.

Ad sua dei dominos deus regis (Quibus)

By EYLES IRWIN, Esq.

LONDON

PRINTED FOR GEORGE NICOL, RAIL-MARK

1798

TO

SIR FRANCIS BARING, BART. M. P.**AND ONE OF THE DIRECTORS OF THE****EAST INDIA COMPANY.****DEAR SIR,**

YOUR accurate knowledge of the subject of the following Essay, and your ability to appreciate its merits, will account for my desire to lend it importance, by the sanction of your name. As an outline merely of an interesting disquisition, has it been offered to the World ; written on the spur of the occasion, and in a mood perhaps not more happy than the season that gave it birth. The conclusion I wish to draw will, I trust, however be granted, that the fate of Buonaparté, whatever it may be in the

outset of his expedition, has little concern with the material points of the Enquiry; and that no future attempts of this nature will ultimately endanger the duration or prosperity of our Oriental possessions; which owe so much to councils recently directed by your wisdom and experience.

That you may long prove an active guardian of so signal a trust, is the cordial wish of,

DEAR SIR,

Your faithful and obliged

Dublin,

15th July, 1798.

EYLES IRWIN.

[8]

AN
ENQUIRY, &c.

At a season when the destiny of Buonaparté continues to be involved in obscurity, it may prove neither uninstrucive nor unentertaining to enquire, how far his boasted invasion of India, whether deduced from the experience of former, or the conviction of latter ages, is reconcileable to reason. If it tend to dispel the credulity of the ignorant, and the fears of the better informed part of the community, such a disquisition will not miss of its intended effect ; though the watchful genius of the British Navy should nip, in their bud, the unbounded views of this vain-glorious warrior.

That the name of Buonaparté has given a credit and celebrity to this expedition,

which it did not deserve, no doubt can arise in the mind of an observer: and though his discomfiture in the Mediterranean should withdraw the glare, which his talents and fortune have thrown around a chimerical project, it may not be unuseful to detect the deception, which the republican system of France has sedulously propagated, to depress the funds, and alarm the monied interest of her powerful competitor.

Were I solemnly called on to answer the question, to what degree our Oriental possessions are threatened by this expedition, I should be inclined to dispute its direction to that quarter. In the seizure of Malta and some of the Greek islands, as stations for the French fleet, and in the plunder of Smyrna and Constantinople, if the foundation of a new dynasty in Egypt limit not his cruize, its objects are probably comprised. In epistolary composition his vanity and presumption have not often been equalled; but that he should seriously attempt

to put in practice, what his blind admirers or envious rivals have suggested, would be to rank him with the anchoret leader of the Crusade, or the errant hero of Cervantes. Buonaparté is not yet mad enough for such society ; however adapted his respect for the laws of nations may prove to a marauding and piratical enterprise ; such, as might suit the morality of a Barbarossa, or the approbation of regenerated France !

In order to afford grounds for this enquiry, I shall concede, what I have so much reason to doubt, that the object of Buonaparté's expedition is such as has been stated ; and that three routes present themselves, of one of which he is resolved to profit. In the next place, I shall consider which is the most feasible ; and, allowing him every chance for the attainment of his object, accompany him, step by step, through the different routes of Suez, Busrah, and Ispahan ; and endeavour to account for his certain failure, in whichever he may adopt.

On the capture of Malta, flushed with

success, and recruited with treasure and ammunition, if we are to believe report, he bent his course to Egypt. Thither, if fated once more to elude the active pursuit of the gallant NELSON, let us follow, and conduct him to the harbour of Alexandria. We shall pass over the insufficiency of this port to contain a fleet, capable of carrying 40,000 men, allowing that the Grand Signior, out of fear or affection, has given orders to admit them into the Turkish haven, as well as the undefended road, where foreign vessels are obliged to lie. We shall suppose that provisions have been collected to feed this large force, while it remains in this desolated city; and on its march to the Nile, (for no craft larger than boats can pass over its bar,) which is at least two days distant. Let

“ The march begin in military state,
And nations, on his nod, suspended wait,”

and, on his arrival at Rosetto, a romantic town near the mouth of the Nile, let a sufficient number of boats, if the river can

supply them, be found ready to transport Buonaparté and his army, artillery, &c. &c. to Grand Cairo. By the terror of his name let his passage up the stream be peaceably effected; let his avenging sword and implacable fury, be reserved for his enemies in the East; and let his entrance into Cairo be celebrated with songs and rejoicings. Let the Pacha and the Beys unite to forward his views, and summon their *navy* to Suez, to waft the conqueror of the Alps to the shores of Indostan. Let all these events combine to ensure his success, and then let us enquire

“On what foundations stands the warrior’s pride.”

From the splendid delusion with which former triumphs and anticipated victories have decorated this picture, let us view it through the medium of dispassionate truth. The Isthmus of Suez is doomed to be the boundary of this vaunted expedition on that side, until Egypt shall possess shipping in the Red Sea, of tonnage equal to the transportation of such an army, and manned with

seamen, skilful enough to navigate the Indian Ocean ! The despicable craft that frequent her ports, if we except a few annual ships from the British settlements in India, being either undecked or unmanageable ; framed merely to thread the shallows on the Arabian coast, and unable to explore the open sea. And even with ample means of this nature in his hands, the enterprise must be carried by a *coup de main*, before the government of Bombay could be apprised of the danger, or send her marine, competent without his Majesty's ships to intercept and destroy the largest transports—to the Straits of Babelmandel. If, on the other hand, it could be judged possible for the isles of France or the ports of Tippoo Sultan, to furnish sufficient tonnage for the purpose, and to those in the secret such an idea is absurd—What would be the result ? The preparations for such an enterprise could not be concealed from the vigilance of the British commanders ; and, from a fleet of twelve sail of the line and as many frigates,

that are stationed between the Cape of Good Hope and the Ganges, there is little doubt but an adequate force would be detached, to counteract the designs of the enemy. And this is on the supposition, that timely intelligence could not be sent by land or sea of the impending danger. In either case this position must be established, that while Great Britain is master of the sea, an invasion of India by way of Suez, is physically out of the question.

As we have disposed of the first route, and we trust, to the satisfaction of our readers, let us proceed to the second, which to my idea, is to the port of Scanderoon, and by Aleppo and the Great Desert, to the Gulf of Persia. I cannot deny that an easier road presents itself, by the Little Desert and the Tygris; but when I know, from experience, that boats could not be procured at Bagdat for the conveyance of a hundredth part of his immense army to Busrah, I would not willingly betray the

ardor of Buonaparté into the labyrinth, which his advocates have prepared for him. To this route far stronger objections may be produced, than to that by Egypt. Without its aquatic advantages, it is pregnant with every difficulty and danger, that a progress through desert lands and hostile tribes, is likely to entail. Travellers are accustomed to pass these solitudes in caravans, where great attention is paid to the proportioning the journies to the quantity of water at the halting places. The probable bane of this army would be thirst, which could not be extinguished. For, allowing that the Arab tribes fled at its approach, that the French conqueror and the *Samiel* were held equally destructive to life, what chance would his followers have to escape the perils of the waste, when the wells at the various stages would not suffice to supply a draught to each soldier, much less to replenish his skins for the succeeding day? But as it is fair, and not hazardous, to make concessions on this

subject, let us admit of their passing the Desert in safety, and at the end of three months—which, considering a distance of 1000 miles, could not be traversed on such a soil and in such a climate in less time—rendering themselves masters of Busrah, which could not resist them. This invincible army must here find a barrier to its progress! The mountainous coast of Persia, presents an insurmountable tract of near 2000 miles to the Ganges; and though the obstacles which the want of transports occasioned at Suez, recur not to the same extent, at the more frequented port of Busrah, to defeat the enterprise, the greater length of journey, the time afforded to betray it, and the vicinity of the Bombay marine to block up the Gulf of Persia, turn the scale considerably in favour of the former route.

It might, however, prove a salvo to the judgment of Buonaparté's admirers, that if he failed in this route, his disappointment would be countenanced by that of two celebrated characters of antiquity: Crassus

the triumvir, made but a short progress into Mesopotamia at the head of the Roman legions, when he was defeated and put to death by the Parthians. The Emperor Julian, with the advantage of a fleet of galleys pervading the Desert, which

“—— saw the hero pass in warlike pride,
While hostile navies swell'd Euphrates' tide,”

was destined to meet as calamitous a fate, nearly on the borders of Persia! We would not wish to deprive them of such a consolation. The fact only serves to confirm the difficulty of an enterprise, where, in their very outset, the Roman eagles were arrested on the wing.

It now remains for us to trace the last, and, if his genius be such as the world conceives, the very road which would be preferred by Buonaparté, were he bent on the undertaking which is the subject of this enquiry. I mean Alexander's route from Phœnicia to the Indus. The laurel of Ammon, in his own conceit, would be admirably suited to the *Corsican's* brow ; and, however

his ambition might be wounded by the event, there is no common distinction in the emulation, that impels to great actions, and grasps at immortal fame.

The march of Alexander the Great to overturn the Persian empire, is too familiar to the reader to require elucidation. The outlines have been given us by Plutarch, and the accurate historian of the Macedonian hero, has filled up the sketch. Thus far, however, it is necessary to observe, to account for the comparative facility with which he transported his army across the desert which lies between Phoenicia and the Euphrates, to what he would have experienced in modern times. A signal revolution must have happened in the face of that country, which contained the city of Palmyra, and under the heroic Zenobia, bid defiance to the Roman power: a country, that is at present depopulated and waste; and unable to afford sustenance or shelter to the wandering tribes of Arabs that infest it.

As we have granted so much to the ad-

vocates of this expedition in the former cases, it would be ungenerous to debar them of the same indulgence in the present. We mean not therefore to dispute the good fortune of Alexander's successor, and will admit, that with equal success he may plant his standard on the banks of the Indus. The Euphrates and the Tygris shall be passed; the Persian territories over-run, and another Porus submit to the influence of the tri-coloured flag! Is this exploit to be the end of his difficulties; the goal of his enterprises? A region, of nearly twice the extent of what he had already passed, would present itself to the ardor of Buonaparté; and warlike nations, to whom his victories and country are alike unknown—the Afghans, the Seiks, and other independent hordes, who occupy the immense interval, would unite to harass his march, cut off his provisions, and intercept his retreat! Should a fragment of his numbers be fortunate enough to reach the Ganges, the navigation and banks of that river would turn

out to be in the possession of the English, almost from the imperial city of Delhi to the Bay of Bengal. "But his direction is to the Peninsula — all this ardor of enterprise, this waste of the human species, has been exercised to effect a junction with the tyrant of Mysore ! with Tippoo Sultan, whose territories lie still at the distance of a thousand miles !" Lucky delusion ! that would divert the efforts of the implacable foe of Great Britain to his own destruction. — Happy ambition ! that would lead Buonaparté to exhaust the resources, and break the spirit of his nation, in fruitless undertakings, and visionary conquests, when he might have continued formidable in his proper sphere ; and neither incurred the danger of combating the numerous forces of the Mahratta states, nor sinking under a policy that holds the balance of power in Indostan !

In this statement of the various obstacles and multiplied perils, which interpose between the outset and attainment of this

expedition, I have hitherto purposely overlooked the impregnable forts, and the formidable armies of the East India Company, who guard, with jealous care, the reputation of the British empire in the East. An army, which consists of upwards of 100,000 disciplined men, Europeans and Natives; who, under the military talents of a Cornwallis, humbled the pride and circumscribed the power of the greatest warrior of Indostan, Tippoo Sultan; and, with equal zeal and facility, would defeat the mad designs, and punish the perfidy of his boasted allies, the French republicans, with Buonaparté at their head. When it is further considered, that such an alliance promises neither co-operation nor stability—that the Mahometan despot, who betrayed his jealousy of his French coadjutors, and drove them, with ignominy, from his camp at Mangalore in the year 1783, can neither enter with cordiality into the views, nor countenance the irruption of 40,000 republicans into India, we may conclude, with

the elegant satirist, that Buonaparté's expedition, whatever form it may assume, would be similar to that of Charles the Twelfth into Russia,

" And *leave* a name, at which the world grew pale,
 " To point a moral, or adorn a tale."

To the query so often put, respecting the possible tendency of the Toulon armament, and the inconsistency of the French Directory, in depriving their country of the services of a man, who has proved himself to be alone calculated for the present crisis of her affairs, I shall briefly refer the reader to my foregoing conjectures on its object; and content myself with the belief, that a little reflection will convince him, how very dangerous a great man may be held in a government, so constituted as that of France; and how readily his talents may be dispensed with by usurpers, jealous of his influence, and apprehensive of his designs. Though the first of her generals, and the flower of her troops, might be absolutely necessary to maintain her footing on the Rhine against

a new coalition, how small a sacrifice would the honour and interest of the nation prove to an infernal junto, who may boast, with their archetype,

“ A mind, not to be chang'd by place or time.”

Dublin, 15 July, 1798.

✂ When Tippoo learnt from the commander of the French troops, Mons. De Cosigné, that a peace was concluded between the French and English nations, which would oblige him to withdraw from the camp, the Sultan in a paroxysm of rage at first refused to permit of their departure; and when he found the Frenchman determined, sent a body of horse forward, to destroy the country through which the road lay to the sea. Distress and danger of every kind was the consequence; and Mons. De Cosigné's detachment arrived at the English factory of Tellicherry in a famished and desperate condition, where the hospitality of their late enemies was fully exercised, to remedy the effects of the barbarity of their perfidious ally! — *Nar. of the Chevalier Beneron.*